

1998 - THE SHORTWAVE YEAR IN REVIEW
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[subheadings added editorially]

NEW STATIONS

Only a few brand-new shortwave stations and services started: Merlin Network One, using spare BBC capacity, first weekly, then nonstop, mostly music. More and more stations originate in Britain--another one is Sunrise Radio, for Asians, but its leader got in trouble with the law.

The United Nations activated Radio Minurca in the Central African Republic, but reviving UN Radio itself for weekday half-hours kept being delayed.

Tannu Tuva, not only an historical postal country but a radio country, now on shortwave with Radio Kyzyl.

RELAY EXCHANGES

New relay deals continued to proliferate, confusing the casual listener about where signals really come from:

Guyana took turns relaying VOA and BBC overnight.

Democratic Voice of Burma kept testing via Palau.

Radio Free Asia bought a new site it could reveal, KHBI Saipan.

Merlin Singapore besides BBC and Japan added Switzerland, Netherlands and Germany.

Voice of Hope gave up on Georgia, and signed up with Germany.

Voice of the Mediterranean, Malta, availed itself of Italy as well as Russia.

Vatican started using Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; UN Radio started relays via Vatican.

Allegedly from three sites somewhere in Europe, the Shortwave Relay Service proliferated pirate programming.

Adventist World Radio added Madagascar and South Africa, while starting to phase out Costa Rica.

Radio Australia, forever frustrated by government denial of Darwin, its strongest site, but made a minor deal for relays via Taiwan.

RVI Belgium finally puts a strong English signal into North America thanks to Bonaire; poor Prague signed on with WRMI and found itself jammed along with everything else, courtesy of communist Cuba.

OFF SHORTWAVE IN 1998

The list of stations or services quitting shortwave in 1998 is too long for our liking: West Coast Radio Ireland, Canadian Forces Network, VOA Rhodes, Russia's Mayak--but continued a bit longer to keep transmitter buildings warm in winter; English from Norway and Portugal; apparently Radio Saint Helena; Estonian Radio, but Lithuania is getting a new shortwave transmitter; Angola's VORGAN; two of the three shortwave sites in Switzerland, transmitters from Schwarzenburg sold to AWR Italy; Radio France International proudly reduces its shortwave output as a public service--including at yearend English to North America; Calvary Chapel in Idaho, which bought the KGEI transmitter, decided against using it, but may sell it to Alaska. HCJB continued to face a frightening future, threatened by vulcanism and airportism.

And there is no more Feminist International Radio Endeavour nor Radio Nadezhda.

SHOULD QUIT SHORTWAVE

Stations which ought to give up unless they fix their modulation so anyone will listen include: Radio Cairo, Radio Moldova International via Romania, RadioBras, and WJCR.

SHORTWAVE REVIVALS

But we have an even longer list of shortwave revivals in 98, showing the medium is still viable: Radio Blue Sky, Mongolia; Nei Menggu PBS, Inner Mongolia; RTBF from the French faction in Belgium, realizing they should never have given up shortwave before; Pinochet's old transmitters in Chile got New Life as Voz Cristiana. Iraq sporadically resumed external service including English -- until December 16; Qaddhafi forsook Arabia, renaming Libya's shortwave, Voice of Africa, and adding some English.

Other Africans revived were in Guinea, Niger, CRI via Mali, Sierra Leone, Kisangani, Voice of Nigeria, and Radio Morocco's Tangier site, not all of which were still going at yearend.

Ireland's RTE added more relays from Ascension and Singapore, and an additional weekly program; but Emerald Radio's limited run was unlistenable.

AFRTS came back to the delight of shortwave listeners, despite sideband-only and lots of interference.

And despite tearful goodbyes, Tahiti's shortwave frequency lived again.

FUNDING SHORTAGES

Budget cuts accounted for problems like these:

Radio New Zealand International was about to close down, but finally got enough to keep going on a reduced schedule by cutting most of its own program production, including several rare Pacific languages. Radio Australia also survived by relaying domestic radio more, not necessarily a bad thing.

BBC got 44 megapounds more, but complained it wasn't enough and proceeded to cut favorite programming, so now "Anything Went".

Voice of Russia could not even afford to answer its mail.

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

Politics rules in Liberia, where Star Radio kept being cut off by the government; Korea North, where Radio Pyongyang tried to involve its listeners with a new competition in the cult of the Kims.

CLANDESTINE DEVELOPMENTS

On the clandestine scene, Nigerians proliferated, with Voice of Free Nigeria, Radio NADECO, Radio New Nigeria becoming Radio SNBS, Voice of Oduduwa, but the only one lasting, barely until yearend the only one remaining was the original, Radio Kudirat.

Off the air, Democratic Voice of Iran, but new on the air, Radio Tomorrow's Iran.

The United States expanded its responsibility as a surrogate broadcaster for countries lacking a free press. Radio Free Asia added Uighur but we're still waiting on Wu; despite the jittery Czechs worried about which part of Prague was most expendable to a terrorist attack, since they got all the heat for the

studios rather than countries hosting transmitter sites, Britain, Germany and Greece -- Radio Free Iraq got underway a sesquimonth before the latest bombing of Baghdad, as did the service to Iran, but we're still standing by for the start of Radio Democracy for Africa.

It became quite clear that the Voice of Southern Azerbaijan actually comes from Israel. During the year, from Lithuania, Radio Free Tibet came and went, but Lithuania also tried Radio Baltic Waves, for Belarus.

The Voice of the Tigers, Tamil Eelam clandestine went back on shortwave for Sri Lanka, on the coattails of a more respectable Tamil service from London, IBC. Another Tamil station, Radio Asia Canada had pretensions of competing with RCI as the Radio Voice of Canada, until it mysteriously disappeared following inquiries into its connexions with the Tamil Tigers.

Goodbye and good riddance to the Khmer Rouge station whose exact name I've already forgotten.

NEW NAMES

Name changes of significance: BRTN became VRT in Belgium; Voice of Free China turned into Radio Taibei International.

Shortwave seasons W and Z were renamed B and A, with a few stations still observing M, J, S and D.

It's News, Now, on VOA almost all the time at the expense of much other programming, and BBC is "modernizing" in the same direction, while dumbing-down its overall quality level.

U S NEWS

Pacifica news finally made it onto shortwave, reluctantly with the persistence of RFPI, but not on WBCQ, which did bring us the satire of Harry Shearer.

Yes, Allan Weiner's dream of his own shortwave station finally came true after a decade, but it turned out to be -- licensed!

Meanwhile, the much-promoted Electra radioship project crashed before it ever reached St. Kitts.

The FCC cracked down on pirates including shortwave late in the year, greatly reducing activity on 6955.

WGTG doubled its capacity with transmitter two, and pushed single sideband as the wave of the future.

The USA gained another shortwave station, what else but religious, WWBS in Georgia; and yet another fundamentalist is on the way from North Carolina.

Jeff Baker was anything but prophetic in choosing Honduras, as the paradise for his followers, and a supposed shortwave station in Siguatepeque.

DISASTERS

A drought in Papua New Guinea cutting off hydroelectric power was one of several reasons for disappearance of regional shortwave stations. But Radio Free Bougainville found a way to operate off -- coconut oil.

Notable for comebacks following hurricanes and floods are Radio Cima Cien, Dominican Republic; Caribbean Beacon, Anguilla; and Radio Internacional, Honduras.

ANNIVERSARIES

In 1998, every station in the world celebrated an anniversary; but the significant LX milestone, that is four sesquidecades, was reached by Radio Sweden and YLE Radio Finland. Bhutan made it to XXV.

DX PROGRAMS

DX Partyline from HCJB goes on and on, though Ken MacHarg left for Florida; we do not expect Spain's Distance Unknown, whose very name was a misnomer, to survive the retirement of Terry Burgoyne. Sheldon Harvey started answering questions about DXing on RCI's mailbag. Merlin Network One gave us the rowdy Media Zoo. We were pleased to exchange guest appearances with Wavescan on Adventist World Radio, but that show is still so elusive actually to hear.

VERIFICATIONS and GOODIES

On the QSLing front, AWR issued a 3D QSL depending on unfocussing your eyes; another club stepped in to keep cards flowing, ARDXC for Radio Australia. Romania offered 36 different designs; Slovakia had multi-color castle stickers; Belgian DXer Guido Schotmans printed and donated some QSL cards to Zanzibar, whence a few have come back to DXers. But Christian Voice, Zambia makes

QSLing do-it-yourself on their website.

PUBLICATIONS

The American SWL Club is gone,
Graham Barclay's Kiwi Radio Weekly from New Zealand has ceased,
but the World Radio TV Handbook is reborn.

JAMMING HONOR ROLL

Cuba remains the source of jamming in the Western Hemisphere,
but even they had the sense to turn it off temporarily for Radio
Marti's hurricane warnings. The Maldiv Islands join the
dubious list of jammers, since the anti-Islamic FEBA Seychelles
dares to broadcast in their language.

EQUIPMENT AND TECHNICAL

Abuse of the Orban 9105a audio processor gets the blame for much
of the distortion and spurious splatter we hear. Voice of Vietnam
cleaned up modulation, frequency variation, and left those far-
out-of-band frequencies.

RCI made the most of its 15 megadollars, ordering new
transmitters, and finally renovating its tiresome jingles.

One more country, Sweden, experimented with digital shortwave,
but it's still in the future; while internet broadcasting
proliferates in the present. And the World Radio Network leads
the way with more relays via NPR, WLIQ-TV, and about to go on
direct satellite in North America.

PROPAGATION

The new solar cycle is taking off, with eleven meters opening
up again, but so far only one international broadcaster, Budapest,
daring to use it; even more so thirteen meters, still with the
notable exception of VOA.

OBITUARIES

We're sad to note the passing of these individuals: Frank Muir,
who brought us so much enjoyment on the BBC; longtime Radio
Moscow announcer Annabelle Bucar; Pete Myers of Radio Netherlands;
Donald Flamm, whose activities led to the VOA; and California
shortwave listener Gerald W. Arrington.

PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS

Other personalities of note: Rudi Hill lost his shows from New Zealand and was reported very ill. Bob Holness and Dave Lee Travis are fine, but BBC has just cancelled Anything Goes and A Jolly Good Show.

Co-host of the year on RKI was Maria Echevarria; on RCI, the Maple Leaf Mailbag became Marc Montgomery's; Reshida Morali on Voice of Turkey's Letterbox. Minnesota's Mindi Ratner became a major voice on China Radio International. Manolo de la Rosa disappeared from Cuban airwaves for reasons never really explained. And a kitty named Paz took over Radio for Peace International. ###

Credits and sources for most of these items can be found in our MONITORING TIMES columns for 1998 and early 1999; and/or in REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING.